



GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

ROBERT GORDON
DIRECTOR

IV-D MEMORANDUM 2020-013

TO: All Friend of the Court (FOC) Staff
All Prosecuting Attorney (PA) Staff
All Office of Child Support (OCS) Staff

FROM: Erin P. Frisch, Director
Office of Child Support

DATE: May 12, 2020

SUBJECT: Partner Operations During the COVID-19 Pandemic

ACTION DUE: Contact your OCS Contract Manager as soon as possible if your office requires assistance

POLICY EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon receipt

PURPOSE:

Due to various measures enacted as result of the COVID-19 pandemic,¹ FOC and PA offices in Michigan must assess their operations and find alternate methods to serve Michigan's child support customers.

Title IV-D child support services constitute an essential service in Michigan and must remain available during the pandemic while also meeting the social distancing standards recommended by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS). Any FOC or PA offices that cannot find a way to continue to provide services should contact OCS for assistance in addressing barriers or obstacles.

This memorandum discusses OCS resources and assistance to support FOC and PA offices in providing services. It also explains the approach OCS plans to take for the evaluation of the fiscal year 2020 Contract Performance Standards (CPS).

UPDATE(S):

☐ Manual

☐ Form(s)

¹ These measures include state executive orders, local stay-at-home orders, court closures, etc.

DISCUSSION:

A. Background

Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, in reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic, declared a State of Emergency on March 10, 2020 through Executive Order 2020-04. Subsequent executive orders closed schools, limited public gatherings, and eventually ordered Michigan's citizens to "stay home, stay safe" in Executive Order 2020-21, which took effect on March 24, 2020. That order limited the ability to "require workers to leave their homes or places of residence except to the extent that those workers are necessary to sustain or protect life or to conduct minimum basic operations."

On March 18, 2020, the Michigan Supreme Court issued Administrative Order 2020-2, which included guidance on which FOC operations should be prioritized during the emergency. The Michigan Supreme Court has since issued a series of orders pertaining to court operations during the COVID-19 crisis,² and the State Court Administrative Office and its Friend of the Court Bureau have issued guidelines, policies, and practice aids to assist FOC offices.³

B. Barriers and Obstacles to Providing Services

In response to executive orders, Michigan's PA and FOC offices were closed to the public. However, all of these offices do not have access to the same resources to continue providing services to customers. Some offices have been able to implement remote work arrangements or staggered work hours so staff can safely continue to work in the office, while other offices have used administrative leave or furloughed staff and are considered closed. Some offices are able to offer their usual services, some offices are offering limited services, and some offices aren't offering any services at this time.

OCS recognizes and commends the steps offices have taken to protect staff, to protect customers, and to continue services. OCS also understands that there has been uncertainty around the various COVID-19-related directives. The speed at which orders were implemented and events unfolded caused local authorities and offices to make swift and difficult decisions about operations.

Most offices are still working to solve issues, including:

- Remote access to software applications, including the Michigan Child Support Enforcement System (MiCSES), and mobile devices;
- Receiving customers, conducting interviews, and executing necessary documents;

² Ref: the [Administrative Orders \(COVID-19\) page](#) on the Michigan One Court of Justice website.

³ Ref: the [Judicial Branch Response to COVID-19 page](#) on the Michigan One Court of Justice website.

- Arranging service of process at a time in which servers may be unavailable and methods of safe service are limited; and
- Mitigating health risks involved with sample collection for genetic testing.

C. OCS Resources and Assistance

OCS wants to help FOC and PA offices provide essential IV-D services to child support customers. To that end, OCS is providing the following resources to assist offices.

1. mi-support

The [Coronavirus page](#) on mi-support was introduced on March 16, 2020. This page includes Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs),⁴ office closures and cancellations, announcements, and news releases. It also includes a county office status spreadsheet, which displays detailed data for each county's current level of operations. Additionally, it contains general information on the coronavirus and resources for working remotely. The Help Desk emails all IV-D staff when there are updates to the page.

2. Michigan State Disbursement Unit (MiSDU)

The MiSDU has remained open and processing payments throughout the response to the pandemic. It has also been taking customer calls for 27 FOC offices, including Wayne County, that have closed or had limited capacity due to the COVID-19 emergency. As a result, call volume to the MiSDU has more than doubled. The MiSDU estimates that in April alone, its staff took 2,500 additional calls and answered 10,000 additional questions. Although the call wait time has increased from one minute to about 40 minutes, callers have been appreciative to speak with someone and get answers to their questions.

3. Remote Access

On April 9, 2020, OCS released [IV-D Memorandum 2020-011, County IV-D Office Requests for Remote Access Due to COVID-19 Stay-at-Home Orders](#). This memorandum provides guidance and instructions that allow partner staff to work remotely.

4. Continuity Teams

OCS, with the support of the Program Leadership Group, is creating six teams to help ensure the continuity of Michigan's child support operations while considering the social distancing and stay-at-home orders. The teams will identify and address challenges, recommend solutions, and establish communication

⁴ An office with a question that is not addressed in the FAQs may submit the question in a Help Desk ticket.

plans – efforts that began prior to the formalized creation of the teams. OCS will share more information about the continuity teams as charters are developed and work is initiated.

5. Genetic Testing

OCS is currently working with the DNA Diagnostics Center (DDC), the Michigan IV-D program's genetic testing contract holder, to determine the safest means of conducting genetic sample collection. OCS will provide more information as it becomes available.

D. Actions for Offices

Now that the initial confusion surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and related closures has started to subside, offices are resuming operations to the best of their ability.

OCS asks that all office managers or designees assess their operations and level of service. Any office that remains unable to provide IV-D services to its child support customers should contact its OCS Contract Manager via email as soon as possible. The office manager or designee should explain the obstacles or challenges that prevent the office from operating. OCS will assist offices in determining how to safely offer child support services.

Offices are also encouraged to use their professional networks such as the Friend of the Court Association (FOCA) and the PA Forum to connect with offices that have been able to successfully offer child support services. The Michigan Child Support Office Status spreadsheet on the mi-support Coronavirus page will help identify which services are being provided in which offices.

E. Contract Performance Standards (CPS)

OCS will not hold offices responsible for meeting any of the CPS benchmarks at the conclusion of fiscal year 2020.

OCS will review fiscal-year-end numbers and post reports to mi-support using the process explained in [Section 1.25, "Contract Performance Standards \(CPS\)," of the Michigan IV-D Child Support Manual](#). Counties are encouraged to review and analyze these reports as part of their evaluation process. However, where offices that fall short of benchmarks would normally be asked by the Contract Managers to submit Response Questionnaires or Corrective Action Plans, these steps will be omitted from the process.⁵ The Program Leadership Group and the IV-D Director will assume that any office that has fallen short has done so due to office closures, reduced staffing, or other circumstances directly related to the COVID-19

⁵ Subsection 2.8.3(B)(9) of Section 1.25 explains some of the circumstances under which offices are not required to complete Corrective Action Plans.

emergency. Offices will not be required to submit Response Questionnaires or Corrective Action Plans for fiscal year 2020.

At this time, OCS will still expect offices to meet CPS benchmarks in fiscal year 2021. During the fiscal year 2021 evaluation, the fiscal year 2020 numbers will be used as prescribed – to look for five percentage points' improvement for offices that fall short of the benchmark for a standard.

NECESSARY ACTION:

Office managers will assess their operations and level of service. Any office that remains unable to provide IV-D services to its child support customers should contact its OCS Contract Manager via email as soon as possible.

REVIEW PARTICIPANTS:

OCS Executive Management Team
Program Leadership Group

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ATTACHMENTS:

None

EPF/JJV